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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000427

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: FORUM ISTANBUL: DP'S MEHMET AGAR

REF: A. ISTANBUL 406

[¶](#)B. 02 ANKARA 8994

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Mehmet Agar, soon-to-be chairman of the new Democrat Party (DP) that will shortly be formed through unification of his own True Path Party (DYP) and the Motherland (ANAP) party, last week called democracy "the most important value in the world today" and the sine qua non for Turkey. He said a DP government would reconcile the secular state and Turkey's historic values. He favors Turkey's EU accession, a fair, democratic solution for Iraq, and a sustainable and correct relationship with the U.S. A Susurluk cloud still mars his image with many potential voters. End summary.

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Leader of the soon-to-be revived Democrat Party Mehmet Agar addressed Forum Istanbul, a gathering of professionals assessing Turkey's future ahead of its centennial in 2023. Agar called the DP a unique convergence of western democracy and Turks' own national values that "cohabit with those of the Muslim world." The Democrat Party of the 1950s paved the way for today's DP to address problems within a democratic framework, he claimed. The new DP would work within a framework of democracy looking for harmony of national and modern values in an environment of peace.

ECONOMIC THEMES: PRO-REFORM BUT PRO-STATE INVOLVEMENT

[¶](#)3. (SBU) Agar sounded strongly pro-reform notes, explaining the promise of EU membership had already fostered international standards and helped Turkey deal with global competition through the customs union and the on-going reform process. Admitting faults in Turkey's own institutions, Agar said international organizations had pushed for reforms that strengthened civil society and prompted significant economic reform, making Turkey more attractive to international capital. Tax, social, public and energy sector reforms would complete the steps needed for Turkey's successful competition in the global economy. However, Agar still appears to cling to dirigiste hopes, saying the DP would support "economic resource distribution according to a democratic process within a free market system under the rule of law." He also somewhat quixotically called for accelerating privatization to promote full employment.

A NO CONFLICT, RULE OF LAW PARTY?

[¶](#)4. (SBU) Calling the DP a "no conflict party" rooted in democracy and the rule of law, Agar said his party would "reconcile" Turkey's secular state and the thousand-year old traditions of flag, nation, family and spiritual values. Agar said there was no path for Turks but reconciliation and

democracy. He illustrated his point while claiming ancestry in the original DP 50 years ago. Agar cited the original DP's rollback of some early Kemalist reforms noting DP changed the language used in the call to prayer from Turkish back to Arabic in June 1950 shortly after sweeping into power.

¶ 15. (SBU) Agar repeated his claim that the problem of PKK terrorism could be solved democratically by focusing on the youth of the southeast, saying this is the job of politics. Recalling 400 years of Ottoman rule in Iraq, the former Interior Minister claimed Turkey knew how to fix Iraq and implied it should be given the chance - similar to assertions we've heard elsewhere (Ref A).

¶ 16. (SBU) Agar ended by wrapping himself in the flag of favorably remembered center-right Turkish politics. The DP legacy, he said, was a straight line from the original DP through the DYP of Suleyman Demirel and Turgut Ozal's ANAP. Setting himself a high bar, he claimed that, in Turkey's current political dilemma, "I must do an even better job than previous center-right politicians." Polarization, he said, was not healthy. But no one should doubt, he declared, that Turkey would be more free and democratic under his leadership.

BIO NOTES

¶ 17. (SBU) After graduation from Ankara University Agar joined the General Directorate for Security and became a district governor in 1976. In 1980 he became the Deputy Chief Responsible for Anti-Terrorism in Istanbul. In 1988, he was appointed Police Chief in Ankara and in 1990, he came to Istanbul as Police Chief. In 1995 he was elected as DYP MP

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from Elazig and became the Minister of Justice in 1996 in the DYP-ANAP coalition government. In the Refah-DYP coalition, he was Minister of Interior. Twice elected as independent MP from Elazig, in 2002 he became the head of DYP after Tansu Ciller resigned.

¶ 18. (SBU) As General Director of Security, word spread that Agar set up "nationalist teams" against the PKK. He is widely believed to have been behind the idea of opening a "Special Warfare Unit" within the police force to participate in anti-PKK operations with the military forces. During the DYP-Refah coalition, he was the only cabinet member who refused to sign a decree authorizing a visit by PM Erbakan to Libya.

¶ 19. (SBU) November 3, 1996, during Agar's tenure as Minister of Interior, a Mercedes collided with a truck near Susurluk, killing three of four occupants (Reftel B). One of the dead was Abdullah Catli, wanted by local police and Interpol for nearly 20 years for narcotics smuggling and political killings. Also in the car were a high-ranking police official and a DYP deputy of Kurdish extraction. The incident revealed politician-police-mafia links and the term "deep state" entered the Turkish political lexicon. After investigation indicated Agar signed papers granting a gun license for Catli, his immunity was lifted by Parliament and he resigned. The Istanbul prosecutor began the process required to charge Agar with "setting up an illegal organization for committing crime" but the Parliamentary Investigation Committee blocked the criminal case.

¶ 10. (C) Comment. New political configurations notwithstanding, Susurluk continues to figure in the average Turk's political calculus. End comment.

JONES